

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PEREDA GOVERNMENT ABOLISHES STATE SECURITY LAW

1. SUMMARY. ON AUGUST 11, THE PEREDA GOVERNMENT ISSUED CONSEC-
UTIVE DECREES ABROGGATING THE STATE OFF IEGE, DECLARED
JULY 21, AND THE CONTROVERSIAL STATE SECURITY AND OBLIGATORY
CIVIL SERVICE LAWS, WHICH WERE PROMULGATED DURING THE BANZAR
ADMINISTRATION. BY SO DOING, IT MOVED DECISIVELY TO BLUNT
CRITICISM OF PEREDA'S POLITICAL MOTIVES, WHILE PROPARGING
THE WAY FOR A PRE-ELECTORAL DIALOGUE WITH
THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. END SUMMARY.

2. OF GREATEST SIGNIFICANCE WAS THE DEROGATION OF THE STATE
SECURITY LAW, WHICH HAD BEEN IN EFFECT SINCE MARCH 12, 1973.
UNDER IT, THE GOVERNMENT WAS EMPOWERED TO DETAIN INDEFINITELY
PERSONS SUSPECTED OF POLITICAL SUBVERSION. AS THE LEGAL
JUSTIFICATION FOR THE DETENTION
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AND EXILE OF SEVERAL HUNDRED CRITICS OF THE BANZER REGIME
(INCLUDING MANY OF THE OPPOSITION LEADERS), IT WAS A MAJOR
ISSUE IN THE
ELECTION CAMPAIGN. LESS CONTROVERSIAL, BUT WIDELY CRITICIZED
FOR BEING UNCONSTITUTIONAL, WAS THE OBLIGATORY CIVIL SERVICE
LAW, WHICH WAS IMPLEMENTED ON NOVEMBER 9, 1974 (THE DATE
BANZER PURGED CIVILIAN POLITICAL PARTIES FROM BOLIVIA'S

GOVERNING INSTITUTIONS). IT ENABLED THE GOVERNMENT TO "DRAFT" OFTEN RELUCTANT TECHNOCRATS TO SERVE IN MINISTRIES AND OTHER STATE ENTITIES.

3. INITIAL OPPOSITION REACTION TO THE DEROGATION DECREES WAS CAUTIOUSLY POSITIVE. PDC LEADER BENGAMIN MIHUEL DECLARED THAT THEY WOULD FACILITATE A DEMOCRATIC OPENING. MNR-PRA SPOKESMAN EDWIN RODRIGUEZ SEEMED TO AGREE, BUT WEIGHTED HIS COMMENTS TOWARD CRITICISM OF THE SUPERSEDED MEASURES. IN SIMILAR VEIN, UDP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE HERNAN SILES, ENROUTE TO THE GUZMAN INAUGURATION IN SANTO DOMINGO, TOLD REPORTERS THAT THE ABROGATIONS WOULD MEAN LITTLE UNLESS COMPLEMENTED BY GENERAL ELECTIONS WITHIN SIX MONTHS.

4. COMMENT. WHILE THE LIFTING OF THE STATE OF SIEGE WAS EXPECTED, THE DEROGATION OF THE STATE SECURITY AND OBLIGATORY CIVIL SERVICE LAWS CAUGHT MOST POLITICAL OBSERVERS BY SURPRISE. AS A MINIMUM, THE ABROGATION DECREES LEND SUBSTANCE TO PEREDA'S CONTENTION THAT HIS IS A TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT, DISPOSED TO WORK WITH THE OPPOSITION IN DRAWING UP GROUND RULES FOR FUTURE ELECTIONS.
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